

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 04688 160848Z  
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 ( ISO ) W  
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4688

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE  
SUBJ: ASSAD'S VIEW OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS

REF: STATE 204738

1. SUMMARY: ASSAD MAY INDEED BE UNDER MISAPPREHENSION THAT SYRIA CAN STILL COUNT ON SUPPORT OF OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. WE ARE DOING WHAT WE CAN TO CORRECT THIS VEIW AND I INTEND TO REAISE MATTER DIRECTLY WITH ASSAD WHEN I PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS, BUT WE PROBABLY WILL NOT HAVE MUCH IMPACT IF CERTAIN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS THEMSELVES CONTINUE TO TELL ASSAD SOMETHING DIFFERENT. END SUMMARY.

2. GHASSAN TUENI MAY BE RIGHT THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS A DISTORTED VIEW OF LEBANON AND BELIEVES THAT SYRIA CAN STILL COUNT ONSUPPORT OF OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS RE ITS ROLE THERE. WE PREVIOUSLY REMARKED ON  
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 04688 160848Z

THE CONFLICTING REPORTS HE GEST FROM HIS DISPARATE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS (DAMASCUS 4251). THIS PROBLEM IS SOMEWHAT AMELIORATED BY THE PROMINENT ROLE BRIG GEN KHOULI IS NOW PLAYING IN DEALING WITH THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. A FORMER ASSISTANT OF KHOULI'S TOLD US THAT KHOULI'S REPORTS ARE OBJECTIVE AND THAT HE DOES NOT SHY AWAY FROM GIVING HIS BOSS BAD NEWS. THIS IS NOT A TRAIT

THAT IS WIDELY SHARED IN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, EVEN KHOULI CANNOT GUARD AGAINST THE PROBABLE TENDENCY OF HIS SOURCES TO SUGARCOAT THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SYRIANS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF CHRISTIAN SOURCES WITHIN SYRIA WHO ARE AFRAID OF SPILLOVER EFFECT FROM ANIMOSITIES BRED IN LEBANON.

3. WE HAVE MADE KNOWN TO THE MFA TOUR CONCERN THAT RECENT SYRIAN HEAVY-HANDEDNESS IN LEBANON IS ALIENATING THE WHOLE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. BUT PROBABLY MAY NOT HAVE MADE MUCH OF A DENT. FOR ONE THING, WE HAVE SPOKEN IN GENERALITIES RATHER THAN PRESENTING HARD INTELLIGENCE AND SO MAY NOT SEEM CONVINCING TO ASSAD IN COMPARISON TO HIS OWN SOURCES. FOR ANOTHER, WE HAVE BEEN DEALING THROUGH THE KILTER OF KHADDAM. THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT KHADDAM'S ACCURACY IN REPORTING OUR DISCUSSIONS--THE PRESIDENT GETS A TRANSCRIPT--BUT KHADDAM'S EVALUATION TO THE PRESIDENT OF OUR SESSION MAY EFFECTIVELY WATER DOWN OR CONTRADICT OUR ANALYSIS.

4. I INTEND TO DISCUSS THIS DIRECTLY WITH ASSAD WHEN I PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS. IN ADDITION, WE ARE TAKING STEPS TO SEE THAT KHOULI GETS OUR VERSION OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. BUT THERE IS VERY LITTLE WE CAN DO BEYOND THIS TO CHANGE SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS, UNLESS CERTAIN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS THEMSELVES  
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 04688 160848Z

ARE PREPARED TO CHALLENGE ASSAD'S VIEWS. SEELYE

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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**Decaption Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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